

Session 2: The New Eve

The knot untied

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Reading John's 'Woman' passages against Genesis 3, the group discovers for themselves the Eve and Mary parallel that the earliest Fathers taught, and learns why the New Eve is the earliest attested Marian teaching of the post-apostolic Fathers and the most ecumenically defensible starting point for Marian doctrine.

Catholic Touchstone. The Protoevangelium and Mary as the New Eve (CCC 410–411); Mary's obedience of faith untying Eve's knot (CCC 494).

What You Need to Know

If Christ is the New Adam, is there a New Eve? Paul builds his whole account of salvation on the first half of that parallel: 'as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men' (Romans 5:18; compare 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45). Brant Pitre, in *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary* (Image, 2018), observes that this is precisely where a first-century Jewish reader would ask the next question: Adam did not fall alone, and Genesis gives the woman a distinct role in both the fall and the promise. If the last Adam replays the first, the reader is primed to look for the woman in the replay.

St. John's Gospel supplies her. John never names Mary; she appears only as 'the mother of Jesus' and is addressed by her son, twice, with a single strange word: 'Woman' (John 2:4; 19:26). In Greek as in English, this is not rude, but it is strikingly unusual; commentators across traditions have noted that they can find no clear ancient parallel for a son addressing his own mother simply as 'Woman.' John also opens his Gospel with 'In the beginning' (John 1:1), deliberately echoing Genesis 1:1, and then counts off days until 'on the third day' a wedding occurs (John 2:1). The evangelist is rebuilding Genesis, and at the wedding stands a woman.

Genesis 3:15, the Protoevangelium or 'first gospel,' is the hinge: 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.' God promises a woman whose seed crushes the serpent. Adam then names his wife Eve, 'the mother of all living' (Genesis 3:20), a title that in the story's own terms is as much promise as fact. Tonight the group discovers these texts from the John side, which is how the Fathers found them.

Historical weight matters for the apologetic. The Eve and Mary parallel is not medieval. St. Justin Martyr teaches it around the year 155, St. Irenaeus around 180, and Tertullian around 200, in churches spread from Asia Minor to Gaul to North Africa; whether or not the later writers knew the earlier ones, each presents the parallel not as a novelty he is arguing for but as teaching already received. St. John Henry Newman argued in his *Letter to Pusey* that this makes the New Eve the primitive Christian understanding of Mary, credibly rooted in the apostolic age itself. When we call Mary the New Eve, we are speaking the second century's language, not the thirteenth's.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Genesis 2–3 establishes the cast: a virgin woman, a tree, a serpent whom later revelation unmask as a fallen angel (Wisdom 2:24; Revelation 12:9; CCC 391), and a choice. Eve hears the serpent's word, disbelieves God, and disobeys; through her free consent, death enters the story alongside Adam's sin.

The pattern inverts point for point in the Gospel: a virgin woman (Luke 1:27), the word of a faithful angel, humble faith, and free consent: 'let it be to me according to your word' (Luke 1:38). Where a virgin's unbelief helped close the garden, a virgin's faith opens it.

The tree completes the frame. Eve took fruit from a tree and gave it to her husband; Mary stands at the foot of the tree of the Cross (John 19:25) while her son, the fruit of her womb (Luke 1:42), undoes the ancient theft by gift. The Fathers loved this symmetry; present it as their meditation, which the texts genuinely invite.

Genesis 3:15 gives the study its title. The enmity is between the serpent and 'the woman,' and between his seed and 'her seed.' Note honestly: in the Hebrew text the one who bruises the serpent's head is the seed, the woman's offspring; the woman herself is the mother of the victor and the serpent's declared enemy. That is exactly the shape of the Gospel: the Son crushes; the mother stands with him in the enmity. (A famous Latin variant, the Vulgate's *ipsa conteret*, 'she shall crush your head,' shaped much art; the doctrine does not depend on it, and we argue from the Hebrew.)

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JUSTIN MARTYR

Justin draws the parallel explicitly: Eve, 'a virgin undefiled,' conceived the word of the serpent and brought forth disobedience and death; the Virgin Mary received faith and joy at the angel's good news and answered, 'be it done to me according to your word.' Justin is the earliest extant Christian writer to reflect explicitly on Mary's role in salvation, and when he does, he presents her as the counter-Eve.

Dialogue with Trypho, ch. 100 (paraphrase)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. IRENAEUS OF LYONS

"The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith." For Irenaeus this is not decoration but mechanics: God heals the story at the same joint where it broke.

Against Heresies III, 22, 4 (as cited in CCC 494)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

Newman argues, in substance, that because Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian all teach the New Eve, across the whole geography of the early Church and within living memory of the apostles' students, the doctrine belongs to the primitive deposit rather than to later devotion. His challenge to his Anglican friend Pusey was that whoever accepts the Fathers as witnesses must accept their Mary.

Letter to Pusey (1866), summary

Catechism Connection

CCC 410–411 teaches that after the fall God did not abandon man but announced in Genesis 3:15, the Protoevangelium, the future victory over the serpent through the offspring of a woman, and notes that many Fathers and Doctors have seen in the woman announced there the mother of Christ, Mary, as the 'new Eve.'

CCC 494 quotes the Irenaeus 'knot' passage directly and adds the patristic summary: 'death through Eve, life through Mary.' CCC 511 states it plainly: 'By her obedience she became the new Eve, mother of the living.' And CCC 726 teaches that at the end of the Spirit's mission upon her, 'Mary became the Woman,

the new Eve (mother of the living), the mother of the whole Christ.' Note for your own preparation, not for tonight's room: the Catechism's own title for her in that paragraph is 'the Woman.' Cite these as they stand; the tree-to-tree meditation above is the tradition's extension, and tonight's applications to our own consent are ours.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Thread A ('the Woman') develops strongly tonight: the group meets both Johannine 'Woman' addresses and Genesis 3:15's 'the woman.' Do NOT connect them to Revelation 12; if someone brings up Revelation, honor it ('hold that; it is coming, and it will pay off') and move on. The sealed guesses stay sealed until Session 8.

Thread B ('where is the ark?') has not started; it plants next session.

Thread C ('mother of all living') plants tonight: make sure Genesis 3:20 gets read aloud and lightly flagged ('remember that title'). It resolves at Session 10.

Session Goals

1. Group has discovered the Genesis 3 background of John's 'Woman' language from the open texts, not from being told.
2. Group can reconstruct the Eve and Mary inversion (virgin, angel's word, consent, tree) unaided.
3. Group knows the second-century evidence and why it matters apologetically.
4. Genesis 3:20 flagged for Thread C; Revelation deferred without spoiling.

Timed Plan (75–90 minutes)

Segment	Minutes
Welcome and opening prayer	5
Win questions	10
Build: the New Adam (Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15)	10
Build: live discovery, John's 'Woman' back to Genesis 3	25
Build: the inversion assembled; Voices	15
Build: steelman and answer	15
Send, Live It, memory verse, closing prayer	10

If short on time: Cut the Dig Deeper on John's Genesis architecture (days and 'in the beginning') and give its content in one leader sentence instead. Keep the full steelman; it is the apologetic heart of the session.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Leader prays: *Father, in the beginning you made them male and female, and when we fell you did not abandon us but promised the woman and her seed. Tonight, walk us back to the garden so we can watch you reopen it. Give us Mary's answer to your word: let it be done. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Win: Opening Questions

1. When something goes badly wrong because of a choice, what is the difference between patching the damage and actually going back and setting the choice right? Have you seen someone do the second?
2. Why do you think stories so often bring their heroes back to the place where everything first went wrong?

Build: Into the Text

1. Read Romans 5:18–19 and 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45. How does Paul frame the whole of salvation, and what role does the pattern of 'the first' and 'the second' play?

Read aloud: Romans 5:18–19; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Paul frames salvation as a deliberate replay: one man's disobedience brought death to all; one man's obedience brings life. Christ is 'the last Adam,' who stands where Adam stood and chooses differently.

Set the hook without answering it: in Genesis, Adam was not alone at the tree. If the last Adam replays the first man's story, who else should we be watching for in the replay?

LIVE DISCOVERY: ONE STRANGE WORD

Read John 2:1–5 and John 19:25–27 aloud. Ask: 'What one word does Jesus use for his mother in both places? Has anyone ever heard a son address his own mother that way?'

Then say only this: 'John opens his Gospel with the words *In the beginning*. He is pointing you somewhere. Go to the first place in the Bible where *the woman*, a tree, and a serpent share a scene, and read God's verdict on the serpent.'

Let them find Genesis 3. Have them read 3:1–6 and 3:14–15 aloud, and do not move on until someone reads verse 15 slowly, twice.

Finish with Genesis 3:20, Adam naming Eve 'mother of all living.' Flag it: 'Keep that title in your pocket. It comes back.'

2. Put John and Genesis side by side. Why might Jesus, in John's Genesis-shaped Gospel, address his mother as 'Woman' at the beginning of his signs and again from the Cross?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Because John is presenting her as *the woman* of Genesis 3:15: the one set in enmity against the serpent, whose seed crushes his head. At Cana her request begins his 'hour'; at the Cross the crushing is accomplished, and the woman is standing there.

This does not exhaust the sealed-guess question, so keep the lid on: acknowledge we have found the Old Testament root, and say the full payoff of 'Woman' still has one more move, later in the study.

3. Now assemble the inversion. List the elements of Eve's scene in Genesis 3 and Mary's in Luke 1:26–38. What maps onto what?

Read aloud: Luke 1:26–38

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

A virgin woman and a spirit's word: Eve trusts the serpent's lie; Mary trusts Gabriel's word from God.

Consent: Eve's free 'yes' to disobedience; Mary's free 'let it be to me according to your word' (Luke 1:38).

Fruit and tree: Eve takes fruit from the tree and death follows; Mary gives the world 'the fruit of her womb' (Luke 1:42), who mounts the tree of the Cross and life follows.

The point of the parallel is not symmetry for its own sake. It is that God, in St. Irenaeus's image, unties the knot at the same loop where it was tied: free consent wounded us, so free consent is honored in the healing.

DIG DEEPER: JOHN'S GENESIS ARCHITECTURE

For a group that wants more: John 1:1 opens 'In the beginning' (Genesis 1:1). John then marks a sequence: 'the next day' (1:29), 'the next day' (1:35), 'the next day' (1:43), and 'on the third day' (2:1), landing the wedding at Cana at the end of a counted week, with a wedding, a woman, and the first sign.

Many commentators, ancient and modern, hear a deliberate new-creation week. Present it as a widely observed literary pattern, not a dogma, and let the group judge the echoes with both texts open.

STEELMAN: PRESENT AT FULL STRENGTH

Present with full force: 'This is beautiful poetry, but notice what you did not produce: a verse. Paul explicitly calls Christ "the last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45); no inspired author ever calls Mary the New Eve. Paul had the perfect opening in Romans 5 and said nothing about her. If the parallel were apostolic doctrine rather than later piety, the New Testament would state it. You have built a doctrine out of one odd vocative and a shared word, *woman*. And be honest about Genesis 3:15: the seed crushes the serpent, not the woman. The verse exalts Christ, and Catholics smuggle in his mother.'

Ask the group to name the strongest sentence in that objection before answering.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Concede what is true: no verse says 'Mary is the New Eve,' and in the Hebrew of Genesis 3:15 the seed crushes the head. Catholic teaching affirms both points; the Church argues from the Hebrew, and the victory is Christ's (CCC 411 says exactly this).

But 'no verse states it' proves too much. No verse states the word 'Trinity' either; Christians hold it because the texts, read together, teach it. The question is whether the texts teach the pattern, and they do: John's Genesis frame, the unparalleled 'Woman' address at the first sign and at the Cross, and Genesis 3:15's own casting of a woman set in enmity beside her victorious seed. The woman is not smuggled into that verse; God put her there.

Then the historical point, which is the sharpest edge: if the New Eve is post-biblical piety, it is strange that it appears fully formed by the 150s in St. Justin, by the 180s in St. Irenaeus (a student of St. Polycarp, the disciple of John himself), and around 200 in Tertullian, in three separated regions. Doctrines invented late look late. This one looks apostolic, which is why Newman staked his argument on it.

End with the concession reversed: everything the parallel gives Mary, it gives her as derived from her Son. The New Eve doctrine is Christology's shadow, cast by Romans 5. That is why it is the safest first step in Marian apologetics: anyone who rejects it must give a better account of John's Genesis design, and of why the earliest churches, in three separated regions, were already reading the texts this way.

4. Eve's 'yes' to the serpent and Mary's 'yes' to God were both free. What does this pair teach us about how seriously God takes human consent?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

God saved us in a way that honored the same freedom that ruined us. He did not repair the fall over our heads; He asked a daughter of Adam, and waited on her answer.

St. Irenaeus's knot image makes it practical: knots are untied by reversing the motion that tied them. The habits that bind us usually came by small free choices; grace unties them through small free choices too.

Send: Taking It Out

1. Mary's 'let it be to me' was spoken before she could see the whole plan. What is one area where God seems to be waiting on a consent from you that you have been postponing?

2. If a Protestant friend asked you this week, 'Where do Catholics even get their ideas about Mary?', what one thing from tonight would you share, and how would you say it charitably?

Live It This Week

- Each morning this week, pray Mary's words from Luke 1:38, 'let it be to me according to your word,' over the first difficult thing on that day's calendar.
- Read Genesis 3 once more on your own, slowly, and write down one question it raises for you; bring it next week.
- Do one small deliberate act of obedience in an area where you have been negotiating with God, and notice what it loosens.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

Genesis 3:15 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader prays: Father, you promised the woman and her seed while the gates of the garden were still closing. Thank you for keeping that promise in Jesus, born of Mary. Untie in each of us the knots our own choices have tied, and teach us her answer: let it be done according to your word. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Close with one Hail Mary, prayed slowly.

LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order:

- Romans 5:12–19 (the New Adam)
- 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45 (the last Adam)
- John 2:1–5 ('Woman' at Cana)
- John 19:25–27 ('Woman' at the Cross)
- Genesis 3:1–6, 14–15 (the fall and the Protoevangelium; live discovery)
- Genesis 3:20 (Eve, mother of all living; Thread C plant)
- Luke 1:26–38 (the Annunciation and Mary's fiat)
- Luke 1:42 (the fruit of her womb)
- John 1:1, 29, 35, 43; 2:1 (Dig Deeper: the new-creation week)
- Genesis 3:15 (memory verse)